



NAVY HISTORY MATTERS

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Welcome to Navy History Matters—our weekly compilation of articles, commentaries, and blogs related to history and heritage. Every week we'll gather the top-interest items from a variety of media and social media sources and then link you to related content at NHHC's website (history.navy.mil), your authoritative source for Navy history.

★ WWII@75: Halsey's Third Fleet Encounters Typhoon

On Dec. 18, 1944, 75 years ago, Adm. [William Halsey](#)'s Third Fleet encountered a massive typhoon northeast of Samar. Destroyers [USS Hull](#), [USS Spence](#), and [USS Monaghan](#) capsized, going down with nearly all hands. A cruiser, five aircraft carriers, and three destroyers suffered serious damage. Approximately 790 officers and enlisted men were lost or killed, and another 80 injured. Fires broke out on three carriers when planes broke loose in the hangers. Approximately 146 planes on different ships were lost or damaged beyond repair by fires, impact, or swept overboard. As a result of the typhoon, the Pacific Fleet established new weather stations in the Caroline Islands and, as they were secured, Manila, [Iwo Jima](#), and [Okinawa](#). To coordinate weather data, weather central offices were established at [Guam](#) and [Leyte](#). For more, read [typhoons and hurricanes: Pacific typhoon, 18 December 1944](#) at [NHHC's website](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhmc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhmc-series/nh-series/NH-51000/NH-51018.html>

★ When Caroline Kennedy Last Christened a Ship in the Name of Her Father

On Dec. 7, for the first time, the U.S. Navy christened a new carrier—USS *John F. Kennedy*—with the name of a president also used for a previous carrier. In addition, the same person who christened the older carrier more than 52 years ago was the same person who christened the newer one. Caroline Kennedy's selection as the carrier's sponsor back then was as much about naval custom as it was about tragedy. During [World War II](#), Caroline's father, [John Fitzgerald Kennedy](#), sustained serious injuries after a Japanese destroyer rammed his PT boat in 1943. After the war, Kennedy became a Massachusetts senator and then was elected president in November 1960. During his tenure, Kennedy dealt with the [Cuban missile crisis](#). He was assassinated on Nov. 22, 1963, leaving Vice President [Lyndon B. Johnson](#) as the commander in chief. Johnson led the effort to name a *Kitty Hawk*-class carrier for the fallen president. For more, [read the blog](#) by Hampton Road Naval Museum's M.C. Farrington at [The Sextant](#).



Photo Link: <https://usnhistory.navylive.dodlive.mil/2019/12/12/when-caroline-kennedy-last-christened-a-ship-in-the-name-of-her-father/>

★ Pearl Harbor Survivor Laid to Rest on Arizona

On the 78th anniversary of the [Pearl Harbor attack](#), Army and [Navy divers](#) interred the ashes of [USS Arizona](#) survivor [Lauren Bruner](#) on the sunken remains of the battleship. Bruner died Sept. 10 at 98. The two Army divers wore vintage [World War II](#)-era dive gear, complete with lead boots and a drysuit—weighing 220 pounds—and the last two Mark 5 hard hats still certified for operational use. The dive gear was similar to the gear worn during [salvage efforts](#) in the aftermath of the attack. Bruner was the 44th survivor of *Arizona* to be interred there since 1982. "It was historical. I was left speechless, honestly," said Army Spc. Julio Melendez, who wore the WWII-era dive gear. "It was a very in-the-moment experience. Just kind of taking it all in and realizing what we were doing and the history that's being made and remembering Lauren Bruner and everything that he had done." For more, [read the article](#) at Task & Purpose.



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/191207-N-KR702-1169.JPG>

★ **Constitution Designated National Historic Landmark**

On Dec. 19, 1960, USS Constitution was designated a National Historic Landmark by the Secretary of the Interior. *Constitution*, anchored at the Charlestown Navy Yard, is the oldest commissioned warship afloat in the world and the oldest sailing vessel worldwide that can still sail under her own power. The ship was launched on Oct. 21, 1797, and first sailed July 22, 1798, as one of the six new frigates of the reestablished U.S. Navy. *Constitution* is remembered for capturing 33 vessels in her 57 years of active service and for the ship's three War of 1812 victories over the British Royal Navy. On Aug. 19, 1812, *Constitution* defeated HMS *Guerriere* in the first frigate-to-frigate victory of the U.S. Navy over the British Royal Navy—then the largest in the world. Today, NHHHC's Detachment Boston is responsible for preserving "Old Ironsides."



Photo Link: <https://www.navy.mil/management/photodb/photos/190819-N-CI012-0011.jpg>

★ **GWOT Memorial Crosses Major Hurdle**

For more than four years, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Global War on Terrorism Memorial Foundation Michael Rodriguez has led an effort to establish a memorial to servicemembers who fought in the post-9/11 conflicts. Last month, U.S. Representatives and veterans Mike Gallagher and Jason Crow introduced a bill to authorize establishment of the memorial. Rodriguez is optimistic Congress will pass the bill in spring 2020. The memorial will honor not only those who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, but those who served in Syria and Africa as well. "This is just kind of reinforcing what we all know needs to be done," said Rodriguez. "For me, I feel it's our duty to honor all those who have stepped forward and served this great nation of ours." For more, [read the article](#) at Vantage Point.



Photo Link: <https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/69195/global-war-terror-memorial-crosses-major-hurdle/>

★ **Arsenal: The River Patrol Boat was the Backbone of the Brown Water Navy**

Due to the guerrilla nature of the Vietnam War, the U.S. Navy needed watercraft in its arsenal to fight on the country's maze of rivers, which was something they had not done since the Civil War. Up to that point, the Navy was focused on deep-sea operations. Submarines and aircraft carriers were of little use against irregular units who used smaller craft to ferry supplies and fight the war. Just six months after the Navy began riverine warfare operations in South Vietnam, 11 new watercraft arrived on March 21, 1966, at Cat Lo, a major U.S. naval base on the northern shore of Cape Vung Tau. The new craft was designated "patrol boat, river," or PBR, a high-speed, shallow-draft, freshwater patrol craft with a fiberglass hull and water jet propulsion. It was the first jet-propelled watercraft used during combat operations, and it became the backbone of the Brown Water Navy. For more, [read the article](#) at *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/Other/K-31134.html>

★ **NMAAHC Displays Temporary Exhibit on WWI's Impact on African Americans**

A new temporary exhibit is open at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture that chronicles African-American participation in World War I and the fight for equality once they returned home. "We Return Fighting: The African American Experience in World War I" is a 4,000-square-foot exhibit divided into three sections—life before the war, during the war, and after the war. The exhibit delves into blacks serving in segregated units and the concerns some had about arming black people, among other things. One issue the display takes on is that no African Americans received the Medal of Honor during WWI, although six received the nation's highest honor for their service in the Spanish-American War. Two African Americans would later receive the Medal of Honor posthumously in 1991 and 2015 for their actions during WWI. The exhibit will be open to the public until June 14, 2020. For more, [read the article](#) at *Navy Times*.



Photo Link: <https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/exhibitions/we-return-fighting>

★ Navy Accepts Delivery of USNS *Puerto Rico*

On Dec. 10, the Navy accepted delivery of the future USNS *Puerto Rico* from shipbuilder Austal USA. Delivery marks the official transfer of the 11th expeditionary fast transport vessel from the shipbuilder to the Navy. The ship will be owned and operated by Military Sealift Command. *Puerto Rico* will provide a wide range of activities, including maneuver and sustainment, flexible logistics support, and relief operations. It is capable of on/off-loading a combat-loaded Abrams Main Battle Tank and provides airline-style seating for 312 embarked forces. For more, [read the U.S. Navy release](#). To learn more about [Puerto Rico's naval history](#), visit NHHc's [infographics](#) collection. Not from Puerto Rico? NHHc has all 50 states in its [state infographics](#) collection, including Washington, DC.



Photo Link: https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=295106&t=1

★ A Closer Look at the History of *Cairo*

During the [Civil War](#), James Eads constructed ironclad gunboat *Cairo* in 1861, and the ship was commissioned as part of the Union Army's Western Gunboat Flotilla. *Cairo* served on the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers and their tributaries until it was transferred to the Navy on Oct. 1, 1862, with other river gunboats. *Cairo* was active in the occupation of Tennessee cities Clarksville and Nashville, and she escorted mortar boats during lengthy operations against Fort Pillow, TN. An engagement with Confederate gunboats at Plum Point Bend marked a series of bombardment and blockading activities, which ultimately led to the desertion of Fort Pillow by its Confederate defenders. After Union forces occupied Memphis, *Cairo* returned to patrol on the Mississippi, joining the Yazoo Pass Expedition. On Dec. 12, 1862, the gunboat was clearing mines when she was struck by a torpedo and sank. For more, [read the article](#).



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-61000/NH-61568.html>

★ NHHc Webpage of the Week

This week's webpage of the week is new to NHHc's [decorations and awards](#) page. The [Distinguished Flying Cross](#) traces its roots to [World War I](#) when military aviation was first used in combat. [Aviation](#) added a completely new dimension to war and with it, a new arena for feats of valor and heroism. Charles A. Lindbergh was the first to receive the Distinguished Flying Cross on June 11, 1927, for his May 1927 solo flight across the Atlantic in the *Spirit of St. Louis*. The medal may be awarded to servicemembers who, while serving in the capacity of the Armed Forces, distinguish themselves for heroism or outstanding achievement while participating in aerial flight. On this page is a short history, further readings, selected imagery, and more on selected Navy Distinguished Flying Cross recipients, including Lt. [George H.W. Bush](#), Lt. [Richard H. Best](#), and Adm. [James L. Holloway III](#). Check this page out today.



Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/80-G-K-13000/80-G-K-13532.html>

★ Today in Naval History

On Dec. 17, 1917, *USS Remick* reportedly encountered an enemy submarine during a storm in the Bay of Biscay, but the extremely rough weather prevented an engagement. While the ship's crew was fighting the heavy seas that day, a depth charge broke loose on the afterdeck. Chief Boatswain's Mate [John MacKenzie](#) noticed the adrift depth charge and at great risk to his life, took prompt and effective action to secure the explosive weapon. His actions prevented the "probable loss of the ship and the entire crew." For his extraordinary heroism, MacKenzie received the Medal of Honor.



For more dates in naval history, including your selected span of dates, see [Year at a Glance at NHHc's website](#). Be sure to check this page regularly, as content is updated frequently.

Photo Link: <https://www.history.navy.mil/content/history/nhhc/our-collections/photography/us-people/m/mackenzie-john/nh-98032.html>